

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH  
SERGEANT MAJOR JEFFREY MORIN, USMC  
SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR TO ADMIRAL WILLIAM FALLON,  
COMMANDER,  
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND  
(VIA TELECONFERENCE)

SUBJECT: CENTCOM OPERATIONS FROM AN ENLISTED PERSPECTIVE

MODERATOR: CHARLES HOLT, CHIEF OF NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS

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MR. HOLT: So Sergeant Major Jeffrey Morin, welcome to the bloggers roundtable. We appreciate you being here.

Do you have an opening statement? Or do we want to just move right into questions and answers?

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Well, I'll just tell you kind of what I've been doing for the last, let's see, the last oh seven, eight days. How's that?

MR. HOLT: All right, sounds good.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Okay, right now I'm talking to you from Qatar -- or Qatar, however you want to say it, or Qatar depending on your pronunciation -- at the command forward headquarters in Doha. I just arrived last night from a seven-day battlefield circulation throughout the Multinational Division Baghdad and Multinational Division Central portions of Iraq looking and going out forward with the troops in the joint security stations and at the forward operating bases and at the combat outposts. So that's what I've been doing here for the last seven days.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Well, Charlie Quidnunc, you want to get us started here?

Q Sure. Command Sergeant Major, thank you very much for your service, and thank you very much for joining the conference call. This is Charlie Quidnunc with Whizbang podcast.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: My pleasure, sir.

Q My question is about the deployment times. Recently the Defense Department said that in order to get a year back home, we needed 15 months in the field. What are your feelings on that duration? Do you think that's going to continue?

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Well, I'll tell you this, sir. I'm going to answer that question kind of in two ways -- first on the affect that the 15 and 12 (months) has on the combat effectiveness of the unit, and then I'll talk about the personnel and their families.

First, with 15 months on the ground, if you look at a unit's kind of lifecycle in the area of operation, because these battlefields and the situation on the ground changes so quickly and so drastically from day to day, from week to week, when you first arrive on the ground, it does take some time for a unit to become fully effective and to be able to keep time and actually try to get a step ahead of the cycle as things change on the battlefield. So the longer someone stays there, the longer they remain combat effective. If you looked at someone coming in for a short duration and it took them 30, 40, 60 days to become kind of up-to-speed, and if that deployment was only a matter of 180 days, you could say hey, you know, one-third of your time on the ground was you sensing and

getting back into the rhythm. So if you continue to pack units and units upon that, you would rapidly see, over a year or two time frame, a significant amount of time you'd be getting spun up. And then you also are getting kind of spun down. You don't want to start things you can't finish toward the end of your cycle. So with a 15-month cycle, you're looking at getting more effective combat power on the ground at any given time.

What also 12 months does back in the rear is, you know, a unit can schedule a specific amount of training, because they have a specific, guaranteed amount of time at home. So they can spread that training out, and they can intensify the training since they know they're going to have a set amount of time back in the rear to prepare to come.

So in two-fold, you get a better-trained force because of the time back at home getting prepared, and you also get more combat power on the ground and an efficient combat power on the ground in Iraq because of the 15 months. So those are two tactical advantages to it.

If we look at the personnel, personnel are an interesting thing.

Are you still there?

Q Yes, sir.

MR. HOLT: Go ahead.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Okay. I had a weird noise in the phone.

With the personnel, it's an interesting dynamic in that when you first tell somebody they're going to be extended or the mention of someone extended, morale does dip. Morale goes down, because they're going to be there longer than they thought they were going to be. But once the announcement is made and once it was made this time, and people knew exactly how long they were going to be there and what that guarantee coming back was, you know, we kind of hit that bottom in the bathtub, and then we started to rise up the other side. So morale has steadily increased over that, because it was that unknowing period -- were we going to be extended, were we not? That did affect morale. But once the announcement was made and people knew when they were coming home and they're guaranteed the 12 months, up that came.

But I think there was another reason for that to increase also was knowing that you're going to be home for 12 months stabilized the family life in the rear, which we didn't have before. You would come home, you didn't know how long you were going to be at home, because you could get called up earlier. You could get called up later. It made it tough for people to plan vacations, and it made it tough on the families saying well, you're going to be home when I graduated, you're going to be home for the Christmas vacation -- you didn't know. But now with that guarantee of 12 months at home with that family, there was a lot more continuity, if you will, for home life now that we did not have before. And that in itself increased that morale also.

So in the long run, when people thought we were going to have kind of a lose-lose, I think we may have a win-win here. At least it appears that way.

Q Great. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay, great, Sergeant Major.

And Grim (ph).

Q Sergeant Major, I see from your bio it says briefly that you worked with the State Department. Do you feel that you might be able to talk a little bit about how interagency cooperation has been going on in Iraq, whether it's improved over the course of the war versus the early stages?

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Yeah, yes, sir. I can let you know that I think in the beginning of the fight, we were kind of fragmented. There was kind of a reluctance it seemed. There wasn't a huge influence or there wasn't a huge number of assistance from the other agencies coming in. It wasn't a coordinated effort for whatever reason. But what I can talk about now is that we do have a much more coordinated effort. The PRTs which are the provincial reconstruction teams that are on the deck now, and we have the EPRTs which is the embedded provincial reconstruction teams which actually are out at the brigade level, they're actually embedded with the brigade so the brigade can sort of infuse them at certain places where they're needed or where we've made great successes in an area. And it's kind of a carrot and a stick, if you will, almost that we can push these people in there. You know, we promise you, you know, security and stability, and that's what we're trying to achieve. And when we get that and when the local populace is supporting or at least not fighting back -- you know, resisting, let's say -- then these teams can get in there and start making life better, you know, on the day-to-day basis for the Iraqi people. So having that there, those are all the other agency guys -- that's State Department guys, that's Department of Justice guys. I mean, those are the individuals that are in there that kind of solidify that effort we have. So the two of us partnered together as we are today is a vast improvement of the way it was before, you know, circa 2003-2004 era.

Q Can you talk just a little bit more about what the State and Justice guys are doing at the PRT-EPRT level?

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Yes, sir. You know, working with the local governorates. Trying to get the rule of law down at the lowest level down there into, you know, the districts. So the Justice guys are in there, you know, trying to train judges and get, you know, our police folks in there working with law enforcement. They're trying to, you know, build investigators and, you know, a police force that's actually functional.

On the side of aid, you know, there's so many buildings, there are so many just basic infrastructure that needs to be rebuilt whether it be schools, whether it be hospitals.

You know, identifying that need and then going forth and either rehabbing or reestablishing, you know, just those human services, another big target that we have in there. And they're doing a magnificent job in the areas that we have secured and stabilized to where they can get in there and operate. They have more kids going to school now than we had before. There's court systems that are coming up and running that never existed before. So they are making some good strides in certain locations but not everywhere, because the situation on the ground does not allow that yet. But as we continue to secure and as we continue to move along with the military-type operations and continue to increase the successes we have right now, I'm sure that the PRT folks will be there right to follow along and just capitalize and further along that effort -- just kind of continue that momentum that we have.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Sergeant Major, somebody just joined us. Who was that?

Q That's Mike Goldfarb at The Weekly Standard -- (inaudible).

MR. HOLT: All right. Thanks, Mike. Well, Mike, you're next in line. Do you have a question for --

Q I would hate to do so fearing that I might ask something that had already been asked. I'll just listen in. I apologize for my lateness.

MR. HOLT: All right. No problem, no problem.

Let's see -- Andrew.

Q Yeah, Sergeant Major, Andrew Lubin from ON Point. It's good to talk to you again, sir.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Oh, hey, how are you doing, sir?

Q Good, thanks. To follow up on the earlier question about deployment times, the Marine deployment is about seven months now. Should that be lengthened do you think? I mean, would the spin-up time, the spin-down time -- these guys seem to be just getting their stride when it's time to start winding out again.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Well, the Marine Corps has a different kind of a dynamic, though. Being, you know, from the Marine Corps I can kind of talk on that is everything that we do is geared around deployments, you know, because we have other deployments that go on. We have deployments to still have our requirement to go into Okinawa and a requirement for the Marine Expeditionary Units that go out. So to start kind of changing, we have to be able to have that ability to move all those units kind of on the same cycle.

Q Okay.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: So in our lifecycle with the MEU kind of attaches to the lifecycle of the shipping. So the Navy likes to stick right around that 180 to 210 days of deployment time for their ships. That helps them with the maintenance on them. It's kind of their maintenance cycles. So we're kind of tied into that cycle. So I think you'll see that the way the Marine Corps manages it along with their schooling, their preparation in training at the entry level and then their preparation through the Mojave Viper process and everything else to get them ready to go over to Iraq, that seven months is the best and most efficient way that we can do it.

Q Okay.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Now, the other thing to keep in mind there is that if you're going out kind of on a seven-month cycle of seven months out kind of seven months back and seven months again, your time off that battlefield is greatly reduced. Although you've missed seven months of that time, you don't really get too dusty, if you will, because you go straight back into another training cycle and then out again. So reducing that down -- the time away from the battlefield -- also allows you to kind of swing back in a little bit easier than if you were off the battlefield for an extended period of time of, you know, 12, 14, 16, 18 months getting away.

Q Okay.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Because there's a cross benefit there of the time between the deployments that's also reduced.

Q Great, okay, thank you.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: And it allows the Marine Corps to go ahead and manage their force the way they see fit.

Q Okay, great, thank you, appreciate it. That is a good update.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Yes, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And well, it looks like we've got some time leftover. So any follow-up question?

Q Yeah, I have a question. This is Charlie again.

One of the questions I had was about recruiting. Apparently, the recruiters now have to spend a great deal more time with the potential recruit's family getting them comfortable with the military. What would you say to a recruit if you had a few minutes with them or with their parents about joining the Army, joining the Marines?

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Well, I would tell a recruit right now that their generation -- the young men and women that are in the armed forces from their generation, the 19, 20 and 21-year-old individuals we have -- are the best, the brightest, the most intelligent, motivated, dedicated group that I have ever, in my 30 years of service, have ever had the opportunity and the great pleasure of working with and leading like that I have today. They amaze me every single day, because they get it. And senior leaders that are out there on the enlisted side and the officer side recognize that. They also recognize that they are our greatest American treasure today. And everything that we do on a daily basis goes to supporting them and making their life the best that we possibly can. There are so many great benefits to spending your time in the armed forces today or just in service in general. There are so many people around the United States that, you know, kind of never lift their finger in the service of this nation. People in the armed forces don't have that problem never saying that they haven't done their part. So I would talk to anyone who's thinking of joining the service that this is a great way to start out your life. The values and the work ethic that you pick up right now and that you become accustomed to will set you up for life long after you choose to depart the service -- whether it would be four years, 14 years, 24 years or 30 years -- set you up for a very, very good life. And there's not many challenges that you would be faced after that that you wouldn't be able to overcome.

MR. HOLT: Excellent.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: That would be my message to them right now.

MR. HOLT: Well, thank you, Sergeant Major.

Any other questions?

All right. Sergeant Major, do you have any closing comments?

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Well, I'd just like to thank you all for the opportunity to spend, you know, another -- it's afternoon here, morning there -- so another afternoon with you all. I appreciate what you're doing. I'd just like to let you know that we are making great progress right now, although you might not see it. But the behind-scene kind of things that are happening out there at the combat outpost level and at the joint security station level where we have fusion happening between the Iraqi security forces and the coalition forces, that we're partnering up together and continuing to prosecute this war against the anti-Iraqi forces, whoever they may be. Great, great partners, the Iraqi people. They are not the enemy. Just so everyone understands, the Iraqis are not the enemy. There are many other players out there that want to be the enemy, but the Iraqi people are our friends. And when we are partnered together with them, as we are right now, success down the road -- and I'll never use the word win, because I really don't know what winning is yet. But achieving success in that country is coming step by step. We'd like to pick that pace up, and we're hoping that in the future with operations like the Baghdad security plan and as we continue to move along with this -- and we will have

another plan, a plan that builds upon the successes of the Baghdad security plan -- that we will continue to pick this momentum up. And somewhere down the line, we will turn the fighting over to the Iraqis as soon as they become self-reliant and have that ability to protect themselves with nothing more than our assistance and advice here in the future. So all of our efforts are going into that right now. Our effort's going to go ahead and helping the Iraqi people secure their borders, secure their neighborhoods and give them a better way of life. And they've got a couple of hundred thousand people in this region right now at the CENTCOM region that that's their major focus. And it's going to continue to be their major focus until we make that a reality, which we're not quite there yet, but we are working towards it.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you so much, Sergeant Major Jeffrey Morin, United States Central Command, senior enlisted leader. I appreciate you being with us, and hopefully we can do this again.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: You betcha.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much.

SGT. MAJOR MORIN: Thank you for your time.

Q Thank you, sir.

Q Thanks, Jack.

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